

Testimony in Support of S.B. 991, An Act Concerning Medicaid Reimbursement for Community Health Workers

Human Services Committee
Laura Shulman Cordeira, MPH

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Dear Senator Lesser, Representative Gilchrest, and members of the Human Services Committee,

My name is Laura Shulman Cordeira and I live in Bethel, Connecticut. I stand in support of S.B. 991, An Act Concerning Medicaid Reimbursement for Community Health Workers.

Having worked in the public health field for the past 15 years, I have seen firsthand how valuable Community Health Workers are to the public health infrastructure. Most recently, during the COVID-19 pandemic, community health workers became the key to getting some of our most vulnerable community members vaccinated. Even once vaccinations became readily available, many communities were hesitant to receive their vaccines. This was due to a long-held distrust in the medical system, the pervasive misinformation being disseminated, and the lack of culturally competent, multilingual resources available, among other reasons.

Community health workers served as a bridge for these communities, providing fact-based health information in a culturally competent way that acknowledged their health beliefs and behaviors. By doing so, they were able to create a trusting link to medical practitioners and increased vaccination rates in these communities exponentially. It is not an exaggeration to say that community health workers saved lives by doing this important work.

Though they played an integral part in the pandemic response, once emergency response dollars ran out, we are now back to the pre-pandemic reality that there is no reimbursement stream for Community Health Workers. Currently, Connecticut's Medicaid program does not reimburse Community Health Worker (CHW) services or incentivize health care providers to work with CHWs, though we know that they are an effective way to address inequities and promote health, particularly for low-income households. This needs to change.

Medicaid reimbursement for community health workers should:

- Center community and CHW voices in all stages of design and implementation
- Reimburse at rates high enough to employ CHWs at a livable wage and cover the costs of supervision, billing, and routine training
- Cover a comprehensive list of CHW services

I urge you to vote in favor of this bill and thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of S.B. 991, An Act Concerning Medicaid Reimbursement for Community Health Workers.

Sincerely,

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